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Response Paper 2, “Barn Burning”

Every family at a point in time will experience some type of life struggles. Some families will endure more trials than others but it is up to the “head of the household”, who is usually the father, to support the family in times of need. In “Barn Burning”, Abner Snopes portrays himself as the “head of the household”. Through the difficult times that he and his family are going through, he feels that it is extremely important to show his youngest son, Colonel Sartoris Snops, how to be loyal to his family. With his military background, it is very easy for Mr. Snops to respond to certain situations with violence. However, his violent responses seem to make things worse for his family. I argue that Sartoris Snops knows that his father’s actions as “head of the household” are wrong and eventually chooses a different path from that of his father although intimidated by him.

In the introduction of “Barn Burning”, Sartoris is put on the stand as a witness to whether or not his father burned Mr. Harris’s barn. Sartoris, only being 10 years old is shocked that he is the one called to the stand instead of his older brother. The reader was able to tell the fear that this little boy was encountering as the author mentioned that “he felt no floor under his bare feet; he seemed to walk beneath the palpable weight of the grim turning faces” (4). This fear was established by the fact that he knew that he had to lie to protect his father. When Mr. Harris decided not to have Sartoris questioned by the Justice (5), this was a relief to him. However, later that evening when the father questions Sartoris, the reader discovers that Sartoris was going to tell the truth if the Justice had questioned him. Sartoris even thinks to himself (not saying it out loud so his father would not give him another blow), that they only wanted the truth, justice (8). Although Sartoris was not intellectually developed, he knew that there was something wrong with the way that his father handled certain things. His father wanted him to put family loyalty before what is civically correct, but Sartoris knew better than that.

Sartoris makes his final decision to do what is right when his father was going to burn the de Spain barn. At first Sartoris is apprehensive about following his father’s order to go get the oil can, and as he was headed back to his father, he realizes that this is the same old habit that had virtually been ingrained within him and that had not permitted him to make choices for himself (21). His loyalty to the family, mainly his father was making him do things that were wrong. He had thoughts of running away but somehow could not bring himself to do it. Although he returns with the oil can, Sartoris makes the decision to warn de Spain about his father’s actions. Making this decision was not easy, as he had to break free from his mother’s grip and run a good distance before reaching to the de Spain’s lighted house (23). However, though too late to stop his father, Sartoris’ actions showed that he was a man of justice. This may have taken him sometime, but the fear that he once had for his father was now gone and he did not look back or go back to his family. Sartoris was only 10 years old, yet he had the ability to choose moral righteousness over doing what was wrong. He broke free from his father’s pattern and chose the path that was morally correct by leaving “family loyalty” behind.

**Open ended question**: What is the cost that one may have to pay when he/she decides to leave “family loyalty” behind and fight for justice as Sartoris did in “Barn Burning”?